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# The Philosophical Thought of the School of the Sextii

Omar Di Paola

Any attempt to write about the School of the Sextii is fraught with difficulty, as there are very few sources and the secondary literature is almost non-existent.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the works that have, as a primary goal, the definition of what the School of the Sextii was, are rare and dated. The only scholar that has made an attempt to rebuild the history of the School is Italo Lana, who has written two papers on this subject,<sup>2</sup> which although they present a really good overview of the history and the thought of the adepts' School, are unable to pinpoint the most relevant features that make the School «nova». Indeed he states that the most important innovation of the School was to encourage correspondence between words and life, namely living a philosophical life that is the expression and testimony of a philosophical mind-set.<sup>3</sup> For this reason the School is not the bearer of new ideas,<sup>4</sup> but only introduces a new life style, because there are no new concepts, but only a new way of demonstrating and communicating them. However, this “newness” that Lana reveals is not a real innovation, because Epicurus<sup>5</sup> and Socrates<sup>6</sup> had already said the same thing.

«*Sextiorum nova et romani roboris secta*»<sup>7</sup> in this way Seneca the Younger defines the School of the Sextii. But if Lana is right, why does Seneca describe it as «nova»? This is the crux that this research seeks to resolve.

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1. As secondary literature see: SCHANZ and HOSIUS 1890, 211-14; ZELLER 1909, 699-706; SILFVERSTOLPE 1917, 238; GIANOLA 1921, 58-68; OLTRAMARE 1926, 153-89; ROSTAGNI 1952, 565-66; UEBERWEG and PRAECHTER 1953, 565-66; FERRERO 1955, 360-78; GRIFFIN 1976, 37-41; MORFORD 2002, 133-4.

2. LANA 1973, 339-84 e LANA 1992, 109-24.

3. See LANA 1973, 367.

4. See LANA 1973, 355.

5. See Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, X, 16.

6. For examples see *Phaedo*, where Socrates coherently with which states, that is, metempsychosis, has no fear of death because it does not really exist, being only a transmigration of the soul. See Plato, *Phaedo*, 63b. About Socrates' coherence see also Plato, *Crito*, 53c-d.

7. Seneca the Younger, *Naturales Quaestiones*, VII, 2.

The known members of the School are: Quintus Sextius the Elder, founding father of the School, Sextius Niger, Quintus' son and scholar of the School after his father's death, Sotion, Papirius Fabianus (both teachers of Seneca the Younger), Crassicius Pasicles, a grammarian, and Celsius Cornelius, an expert doctor.

Our sources on Quintus Sextius are essentially two:<sup>8</sup> Claudianus Mamertus<sup>9</sup> and Seneca the Younger.<sup>10</sup> Everything that Quintus Sextius wrote was written in Ancient Greek,<sup>11</sup> and his major interest was focused on moral philosophy, where he tried to give a philosophical veneer to Roman morality.<sup>12</sup> Quintus Sextius' was born no later than 70 B.C.<sup>13</sup> This date is based on a quotation from Seneca the Younger, where he states that Sextius rejected the *laticlavus* that Julius Caesar had offered him,<sup>14</sup> which would probably have been between about 48 B.C. (the year of the battle of Pharsalus) and 44 B.C. (the year of Julius Caesar's death). So Sextius' birth cannot be placed later than 70 B.C., as it would make Sextius too young to become a senator.

Concerning the beginning of the philosophical activity of the School, Lana states that it needs to be placed just after the dictator's death,<sup>15</sup> because Caesar's offer would be the sign that the "philosophical turn" of Sextius at this time had not yet happened. However, no one can say when Sextius opened his school, and the hypothesis argued by

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8. In fact there are three more quotations, but being merely biographical they are not considered for the present survey. Suetonius, *De grammatica*, 18, only says that Quintus Sextius had accepted Crassicius Pasicles into his school. Plutarch, *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*, cap. 5, says that the beginning of Sextius' philosophical activity had been so difficult that he was near to killing himself. In the end Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XVIII, 68, compares the image of Sextius with Democritus, telling how Sextius arrived at Athens and became rich speculating on the price of olive oil. Indeed, predicting the trend of the harvest, he bought up the olive oil and resold it at a higher value. So he became incredibly rich, but he gave his fortune to the City of Athens, thus showing how through philosophy he could easily become rich at any time, if he wanted to.

9. See Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, II, 8.

10. See Seneca the Younger, *De Ira*, II, 36; III, 36; *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 59, 7; 64, 2-3 e 5; 73, 12 e 15; 98, 13; 108, 18.

11. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 59, 7.

12. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 59, 7.

13. See LANA 1992, 111.

14. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 98, 13.

15. See LANA 1992, 111.

Lana is inconsistent, because Caesar could have offered the *laticlavus* to Sextius owing to the prestige and the followers that he had, being a scholarch. As for the end of the School, it is reasonable to place it in 19 A.D.,<sup>16</sup> the year of the Tiberian *senatusconsultum*<sup>17</sup> by virtue of which foreign cults were banned. This *senatusconsultum* also affected the Sextian School, because, as Seneca the Younger relates, the vegetarian diet adopted by members of the School could appear as a proof of the worship of a foreign religion.<sup>18</sup>

Quintus Sextius' philosophical activity was focused on the moral improvement of the human soul. Like the Hellenistic schools, the aim of the Sextian School was to lead man to happiness, which would lead him to «vie with Jupiter». <sup>19</sup> For this reason Quintus Sextius encouraged his disciples to think about their selves, making an «examination of conscience» every night.<sup>20</sup> For the same reason he forbade all animal food, believing that it would be proper not to foster cruelty by killing animals, and to maintain a frugal life, unaccustomed to luxury and therefore to the vices this leads to.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, as regards the soul, he believed that it was an elusive incorporeal power, which pervades the body and keeps it united.<sup>22</sup>

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16. See LANA 1992, 111.

17. *Senatoconsultum*'s sources are: Tacitus, *Annales*, 2, 85; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 36; Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, 18, 3, 5; Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 108, 23.

18. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 108, 23.

19. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 73, 12. *Solebat Sextius dicere Iovem plus non posse quam bonum virum. Plura Iuppiter habet quae praestet hominibus, sed inter duos bonos non est melior qui locupletior, non magis quam inter duos quibus par scientia regendi gubernaculum est meliorem dixeris cui maius speciosiusque navigium est.*

20. See Seneca the Younger, *De Ira*, III, 36. *Faciebat hoc Sextius, ut consummato die, cum se ad nocturnam quietem recepisset, interrogaret animum suum: 'quod hodie malum tuum sanasti? Cui vitio obstitisti? Qua parte melior es?'*

21. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 108, 18. *Hic homini satis alimentorum citra sanguinem esse credebatur et crudelitatis consuetudinem fieri ubi in voluptatem esset adducta laceratio. Adiciebat contrahendam materiam esse luxuriae; colligebat bonae valetudini contrariaesse alimenta varia et nostris aliena corporibus.*

22. Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, II, 8. *Romanos etiam, eosdemque philosophos testes citamus, apud quos Sextius pater Sextiusque filius propenso in exercitium sapientiae studio apprimè philosophati sunt atque hanc super omni anima attulere sententiam: incorporalis, inquit, omnis est anima et illocalis, atque indeprehensa vis*

Sextius Niger like his father wrote in Ancient Greek,<sup>23</sup> and from the few sources that we have, we can conclude that his theoretical interests were focused on medicine.<sup>24</sup> He is quoted many times in the *Naturalis Historia*<sup>25</sup> by Pliny the Elder, in which he is called *diligentissimus medicinae*.<sup>26</sup> However, the Plinian quotations do not allow us to define his philosophy, as they are technical in nature, about medical features of plants and animals.<sup>27</sup> The only quotation that gives us any information about Sextius Niger's philosophical theory, is one by Claudianus Mamertus,<sup>28</sup> who states that both Quintus Sextius and Sextius Niger believed that the soul was «*incorporalis*», «*illocalis*», and «*sine spatio*».<sup>29</sup>

Another member of the sect was Sotion of Alexandria. As regards his philosophical theory we have only one source,<sup>30</sup> the *Epistula* CVIII of Seneca the Younger.<sup>31</sup> The Senecan passage is like a report of a lesson by Sotion. In this lesson he explains the reasons for which you should not eat meat. First he explains why Pythagoras did not eat meat, then why Quintus Sextius did not do so, and finally he explained his own reasons. Pythagoras did not eat meat because, believing in metempsychosis, he felt that if he did he would commit a sin, because he might accidentally eat his father or his mother.<sup>32</sup> Quintus Sextius added to this reason that there was enough food for mankind to live

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*quaedam, quae sine spatio capax, corpus haurit et continet.*

23. See the indices to the books of Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*: XII, XIII, XX, XXIII, XXIV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXII, XXXIII.

24. See Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXII, 13.

25. See Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XVI, 20; XX, 24 e 50; XXVIII, 30 e 34; XXIX, 23; XXXII, 13.

26. Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXII, 13.

27. For example in Plinius the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XX, 50, he says that the *Nasturtium* (Watercress) if you burn it keep out the snake; and also in order to give an another example, in *Naturalis Historia*, XXIX, 23, he says that the salamander could be a good aphrodisiac if you cook it in the right way.

28. Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, II, 8. For the latin text see n. 22.

29. Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, II, 8.

30. Sotion of Alexandria is quoted also in *Epistula* 49, 2 and in Jerome, *Chronicon*, 13. But the quotation in *Epistula* 49 tells us only that Seneca was a «*puer*» (a boy) when he attended the lessons of Sotion, while the passage of Jerome tells us that Sotion's fame was connected to the fact that he had been Seneca the Younger's teacher.

31. Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 17-21.

32. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 19.

by, so he believed that there were no reasons to feed the «*crudelitatis consuetudinem*»<sup>33</sup> (habit of cruelty) by killing animals unnecessarily. Furthermore, he added a medical reason to this moral-economic one,<sup>34</sup> stating that a varied diet was harmful to the body.<sup>35</sup> While Sotion advised his pupil to «*sustinere iudicium*»<sup>36</sup> (to suspend judgement), nonetheless he accepted this theory; indeed he argued that, if it were true, it would have protected him from committing a sin, whereas, if false, it would at least have rendered him far more distant from vice.<sup>37</sup>

Fabianus Papirius was another member of the School. He wrote in Latin,<sup>38</sup> was born around 35 B.C.,<sup>39</sup> and he probably had Hispanic origins.<sup>40</sup> The sources that mention him are: Pliny the Elder,<sup>41</sup> Seneca the Elder,<sup>42</sup> and Seneca the Younger.<sup>43</sup>

The passages in Pliny the Elder are irrelevant to this research, although numerous, because they have technical-scientific features, and they do not say anything about philosophical theories maintained by Fabianus. The only valuable information they give us is that Fabianus was an expert “scientist” (*naturae rerum peritissimus*).<sup>44</sup> This information is important because it reinforces the idea of an inclination of the Sextian School towards physical philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

The quotations in Seneca the Elder, although fragmentary, describe clearly Fabianus’ philosophical features. In the *Controversiae* these are

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33. Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 18.

34. See GRIFFIN 1976, 41.

35. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 18.

36. Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 21.

37. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 21.

38. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 100, 1.

39. See LANA 1973, 365

40. See BORNECQUE 1902, 185-6.

41. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, II, 46; 105; IX, 8; XII, 9; XV, 2; XVIII, 68; XXIII, 30; XXVIII, 14; XXXVI, 24.

42. Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae*, I, 4; 9-10; and *Controversiae*, II, *praef.* 1-5; 1, 10-13 and 25 and 28; 2, 4; 3, 5 and 9 and 12; 4, 3 and 7 and 10-11; 5, 6-7 and 18-19; 6, 2 and 4; VII, *praef.* 5.

43. Seneca the Younger, *De brevitate vitae*, 10,1; 13, 9; *Ad Marciam consolationem*, 23, 5; *Naturales Quaestiones*, III, 27, 3-4; *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 11,4; 40, 12; 52, 11; 58, 6; 100, 1-2; 100, 5; 100, 9.

44. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXVI, 24.

45. Regarding the classical Hellenistic tripartition of philosophy. See ARNIM VON 2002, 307 and ISNARDI PARENTE 1982.

stressed by the same Seneca the Elder, who emphasizes them, placing the epithet «*philosophus*» after Fabianus' name.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, Seneca the Elder noted, as a central feature of Fabianus' philosophical thought, the critique of wealth,<sup>47</sup> seen as corrupting morals,<sup>48</sup> which transforms man from «*bonus*» (good) to «*malus*» (evil);<sup>49</sup> and on the other hand the idea that right action is not a means to an end, leading to a reward that one day may be bestowed, but rather is a good thing in itself, done not for other motives but carried out only because it is good and so sufficient in itself.<sup>50</sup> In the *Suasoriae*<sup>51</sup> there emerges the theme of the mutability of fortune and the measure to maintain in times of good fortune. We see how this concept is engaged in a quotation in which the epithet «*philosophus*»<sup>52</sup> appears after Fabianus' name. In this way Seneca the Elder, in writing the name «*philosophus*», tries to justify and give meaning to a thought that in some ways seems dissonant with the other statements. Reviewing the fifth *Controversia* of the second book, one can notice how the «*color*»<sup>53</sup> employed by Fabianus is clashing with other «*colores*» argued by other orators. In fact, any other declaimer, setting out his own «*color*» follows a

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46. The epithet «*philosophus*» after Fabianus' name appears three times: Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* II, 1, 25; e 5, 18; e Id., *Suasoriae*, I, 9.

47. About the critique of wealth see also Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* II, 10-13.

48. About wealth corrupting people see also Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 6, 2. *Noli pecuniam concupiscere. Quid tibi dicam: haec est, quae auget discordiam urbis et terrarum orbem in bellum agitat, humanum genus cognatum natura in fraudes et scelera et mutuum odium instigat, haec est, quae senes corrumpit?*

49. See Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 1, 25. *Fabianus philosophus hoc colore usus est, ut diceret: etiamsi sustinerem alicui tradi, at diviti nolle. Et in divitias dixit, non in divitem: illas esse quae frugalitatem, quae pietatem expugnassent, quae malos patres, malos filios facerent.*

50. See Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 5, 18. *Fabianus philosophus colorem non magis bono viro convenientem introduxit quam oratori callido. Dixit enim et cogitasse se tyrannicidium et uxori indicasse et illam tum quidem fecisse quod probam feminam facere oportuit, nunc peccare, quod putet beneficium esse recte facere. Hic color illi et in illa parte profuit: si beneficium putas te dedisse, quod tyrannicidium non prodidisti, ego prior dedi, qui tibi tyrannicidium credidi. Repudium excuso quoivis liberorum cupiditate, quo semper uti tamquam civis debui, sed postea magis tamquam tyrannicida.*

51. Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae*, I, 4 e 9-10.

52. Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae*, I, 9.

53. The «*Color*» was a kind of attenuating and aggravating circumstances used by rhetoricians to strengthen a particular opinion. See ZANON DAL BO 1986, 11.

defensive line closely related to the cause, focusing on the actors of the same.<sup>54</sup> Fabianus, without going beyond the subject, does not focus his attention as much on stakeholders, but rather on the concept of honesty (*probitas*), basing his defensive line on it, and emphasizing how honesty should be achieved *per se*. In this way, instead of a legal defense, which is typical of the majority of declaimers, Fabianus by choosing a philosophical approach to declamation, introduces values derived from his philosophical thought, and Seneca the Elder, by employing the epithet «*philosophus*», reports this diversity of approach, of which he himself was already aware.

Conversely, from Seneca the Younger's quotations we learn paradoxically less than we would expect, because, despite an entire *Epistula* devoted to him,<sup>55</sup> there are only a few passages that contain some doctrine supported by Fabianus. The only theory of Fabianus that we can find is that of the «universal palingenesis», but unlike Chrysippus,<sup>56</sup> he argues that it had to be caused by flooding due to incessant rains.<sup>57</sup> Beyond this, the quotations of Seneca the Younger confirm what you can find in other sources, namely his unique naturalistic-physician ability,<sup>58</sup> and his role as a militant philosopher, focusing exclusively on improving morals,<sup>59</sup> and despising the «*cavillationes*» of «*cathedrarii*» philosophers.<sup>60</sup>

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54. See for instance the *Color* presented by Cestius in Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* II, 5, 18. *Cestius pro viro <hunc> introduxit colorem: quo tempore uxor torta est, nihil adhuc de tyrannicidio cogitabam; postea cogitavi et haec ipsa mihi causa cogitandi fuit uxoris ultio*. The *controversia* concerns a trial for ingratitude, and talks about a wife who, when tortured by a tyrant, doesn't betray her husband, but who was repudiated by the latter because she was sterile. For the husband's defence, Cestius tries to argue that the husband had planned to kill the tyrant only after his wife's torture, thus subtracting the credit from the wife for not having betrayed her husband and applying it to himself. In this way, the we have different setting between the two *Colores*: Fabianus aims at the establishment of moral purity, while Cestius aims at the absolution of his "client".

55. Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 100.

56. See ARNIM VON 2002, 650-3, fr. 618.

57. See Seneca the Younger, *Naturales Quaestiones*, III, 27, 3-4.

58. See Seneca the Younger, *Consolatio ad Marciam*, 23, 5, where he relates gigantism with early death.

59. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 100, 11.

60. See Seneca the Younger, *De brevitate vitae*, 10, 1.



Regarding Crassicius Pasicles we know very little, and almost all<sup>61</sup> of the information that we have comes from Suetonius.<sup>62</sup> He was a freedman, born in Tarentum, and very close to the triumvir Mark Antony, who brought up his son Iullus<sup>63</sup> He had a grammar school, and became famous for his commentary on Helvius Cinna's *Zmyrna*, but suddenly he closed his school and joined the Sextian School.<sup>64</sup> The reasons for this change are unknown; however, Lana<sup>65</sup> speculates that it was due to the fall into disgrace of Iullus Antony, the son of the triumvir, who in 2 B.C. was sentenced to death, accused both of being the lover of Julia the Elder, Augustus' daughter, and to have hatched a conspiracy against Augustus in order to attain the empire.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding Aulus Cornelius Celsus, his membership of the Sextian School is controversial, although spoken of by Quintilian.<sup>67</sup> In fact, as clearly illustrated by Lana,<sup>68</sup> Celsus, though naming many doctors in his work *De Medicina*, never mentions Sextius Niger, its alleged scholar, who was an expert physician too, and often mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*, who considered him «*diligentissimus medicinae*».<sup>69</sup> Lana overcame this problem, arguing that Celsus, when he wrote his work, had long left the school,<sup>70</sup> assuming also that he left the same way as Seneca the Younger when he left the sect in 19 A.D., the year of the *senatusconsultum* banning oriental cults<sup>71</sup> That being the case, the figure of Celsus is useless in the reconstruction of the thoughts of the School, since he had "disowned" belonging to the School, inasmuch as he denied vegetarianism, and among the foods

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61. Almost totally because in Cicero, [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filippiche\\_\(Cicerone\)](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filippiche_(Cicerone)) *Philippicae orationes*, 13, 3 he has briefly quoted almost in passing a certain "Crassicius" probably identifiable with our Crassicius, since Cicero describes him as being among the «*consulores et sodales*» of Mark Antony, thus confirming the news passed from Suetonius. Of the same opinion is LANA 1992, 117.

62. Suetonius, *De grammatica*, 18.

63. See Suetonius, *De grammatica*, 18.

64. See Suetonius, *De grammatica*, 18.

65. See LANA 1973, 375.

66. See Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, LV, 2.

67. Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria*, X, 1, 24.

68. See LANA 1973, 379.

69. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXII, 13.

70. See LANA 1973, 380.

71. See LANA 1973, 382.

that should be consumed in a balanced diet, to help to keep the body in health, he lists several meats.<sup>72</sup>

Let us return to the initial question of why Seneca the Younger calls the Sextian School «*nova*» (new). Of course, from its beginnings, it seeks to be in line with the great Hellenistic schools (Academy, Peripatos, Stoa, and Garden) and like those it shows its disciples the way to reach happiness. As Lana observes,<sup>73</sup> it was noted for its rejection of political life, but nevertheless that cannot indicate either a new element, or a characteristic feature of the School, as Epicurus had already taught us abstention from public life<sup>74</sup> with the aphorism *Λάτρε βιωσας* (live hidden).

From the findings so far, we can at least say that the school of the Sextii had taken to heart that part of the philosophy called physical, characterizing itself mainly as a philosophical-medical school. In fact, each member of the School was interested in medicine, excepting perhaps Crassicius, of whom we know nothing. Sextius the Elder motivated his choice of vegetarianism also on medical grounds, arguing that a varied diet was harmful to the body;<sup>75</sup> Sextius Niger wrote a medical work entitle *Περὶ ὕλης*<sup>76</sup> and was described by Pliny, as we have seen, as «*diligentissimus medicinae*»;<sup>77</sup> Fabianus, beyond being «*naturae rerum peritissimus*»,<sup>78</sup> identifying gigantism as a cause of premature death,<sup>79</sup> shows great medical competence; Sotion is the one who passed on the vegetarian argument to Seneca the Younger;<sup>80</sup> Celsus was quite a famous doctor, although he probably wrote *De Medicina* when he had already dropped out of the school.<sup>81</sup>

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72. See Celsus, *De Medicina*, II, 18, 1-10. See also II, 16, 1 when about fleshy food, he doesn't talk about flesh food abstinence, but says only that if you are sick you shouldn't eat it.

73. See LANA 1973, 345-55.

74. See Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, X, 119.

75. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 108, 18: *colligebat bonae valetudini contrariaesse alimenta varia et nostris aliena corporibus*.

76. See Erotiani, *Vocum Hippocraticarum collectio: cum fragmentis*, in NACHMANSON 1918, 59.

77. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXII, 13.

78. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXVI, 24.

79. See Seneca the Younger, *Consolatio ad Marciam*, 23, 5.

80. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, 108, 17-21.

81. LANA 1992, 123.

Another characteristic feature was the contempt for honours and riches, both regarded as false benefits, which corrupt man, diverting him from the path that leads to happiness. We find this in Sextius the Elder, Sotion and Fabianus. About Sextius the Elder, we know that he refused the *laticlavus* offered to him by Caesar,<sup>82</sup> and if we are to believe what Pliny the Elder<sup>83</sup> wrote about him, giving Sextius the same anecdote as is attributed to Democritus,<sup>84</sup> we know that he gave all the proceeds of his financial speculation to Athens, showing the Athenians the emptiness of wealth. Sotion supported vegetarianism, stressing that in any case frugality was good;<sup>85</sup> while about Fabianus we have several fragments handed down from Seneca the Elder,<sup>86</sup> which clearly show how from wealth comes only moral corruption, and therefore conflict that leads to unhappiness. In these positions, however, little is new, because they may be easily traced to a Platonic-Stoic matrix, which also recognizes wealth as a false benefit. However, it must be said that the criticism of wealth and luxury was a very common theme, particularly in Latin diatribe, to the extent that Oltramare saw in Sextius the Elder the initiator of the revival of the diatribic style, that in the Augustan age will see a blossoming.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, in agreement with Lana,<sup>88</sup> we disagree with the position of Oltramare, because although the Sextian School was definitely affected by the influence of the diatribic movement that was then developing, one certainly cannot say that it belonged there, since their obvious interest in physical philosophy clashes with the exclusively moral concern characteristic of the diatribe.

So wherein lies the “newness” of the school is difficult to say, but, although we run the risk of being wrong, we have to try to define it. Seneca the Younger defines Sextius the Elder as a Stoic «*manqué*»,<sup>89</sup> «*manqué*» because he refused the Stoic appellation to describe his

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82. See Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 98, 13.

83. See Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XVIII, 68.

84. For the anecdote see note 8.

85. See Seneca il Giovane, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 108, 21.

86. See Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, II, 1, 10-13 e 6, 2.

87. See OLTRAMARE 1926, 153, 160, and 296.

88. See LANA 1973, 339.

89. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 64, 2. *Lectus est deinde liber Quinti Sextii patris, magni, si quid mihi credis, viri, et licet neget Stoici.*

philosophy. What is certain is that Stoic elements are to be found in the Sextian doctrine, especially in the prominence given to the ideal of the Wise Man, who «vies with Jupiter in happiness»,<sup>90</sup> and the importance that virtues have in the construction of this archetype.<sup>91</sup> But it is precisely in the definition of virtue that perhaps lies the novelty of the school. This definition in the School's thought is adapted to the "taste" of the times and the Roman habits, so among all the facets of virtue neither Justice nor Temperance are exalted, but rather Courage. This is clear from a fragment of Seneca the Younger,<sup>92</sup> in which is reported a Sextian metaphor, that compares the Wise Man to an army advancing into the enemy camp, ready for any attack. This metaphor refers to the first definition of Courage present in Plato's *Laches*, according to which the brave man is he who «remaining in the line, wants to fight against the enemy and not run away».<sup>93</sup> But unlike Socrates, who tolerated the "strategic retreat", and on this basis grounded his rebuttal, here this isn't allowed. In fact, the Wise Man, in the same way as the brave man, must do battle «*sine tumultu*», without relying on Fortune.<sup>94</sup> In this way Courage is understood as the precept «don't give way in the face of duty», and, necessity being the supreme duty, the phrase must be transformed into «don't give way in the face of necessity». This is the typical moral of a "good soldier" that is in his place awaiting orders from his general, who in this case is identified with necessity. The novelty introduced by the Sextian school is therefore in this new

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90. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 73, 12.

91. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 73, 15.

92. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 59, 7. *Sextium ecce cum maxime lego, virum acrem, Graecis verbis, Romanis moribus philosophantem. Movit me imago ab illo posita: ire quadrato agmine exercitum, ubi hostis ab omni parte suspectus est, pugnae paratum. 'Idem' inquit 'sapiens facere debet: omnis virtutes suas undique expandat, ut ubicumque infesti aliquid orietur, illic parata praesidia sint et ad nutum regentis sine tumultu respondeant.' Quod in exercitibus iis quos imperatores magni ordinant fieri videmus, ut imperium ducis simul omnes copiae sentiant, sic dispositae ut signum ab uno datum peditem simul equitemque percurrat, hoc aliquanto magis necessarium esse nobis ait.*

93. It is my translation of Plato, *Laches*, 190e: εἰ γὰρ τις ἐθέλοι ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ μὴ φεύγειν, εὖ ἴσθι ὅτι ἀνδρείος ἂν εἴη.

94. See Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 59, 8: *Sapiens autem, ad omnem incursum munitus, intentus, non si paupertas, non si luctus, non si ignominia, non si dolor impetum faciat, pedem referet: interritus et contra illa ibit et inter illa.*

conception of Virtue, enhancing the national virtue of courage<sup>95</sup> as “supreme” virtue, creating the first Roman philosophy, and in this sense we can rightfully agree with Seneca the Younger: «*Sextiorum nova et Romani roboris secta*».<sup>96</sup>

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95. LÉVY 2002, 87.

96. Seneca the Younger, *Naturales Quaestiones*, VII, 2.

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